

OUR VIEW

Oregon should address nursing shortage

Oregon has one of the lowest rates of hospital beds per capita in the country. The number of staffed hospital beds per 1,000 population is about 1.7.

That can actually be good. When there aren't too many people in the hospital, the health system isn't supporting unnecessary beds and staff.

The pandemic isn't one of those times. The bigger issue, though, has been staffing. Oregon and the nation were already facing a nursing shortage before the pandemic. The burnout and stress caused by the pandemic made it worse. The vacancy rate for nursing positions was about 10% in 2020. Hundreds of nursing positions are open across the state.

Hospitals have been relying on traveling nurses to pick up some of the slack. They can make thousands of dollars more than staff nurses, which only encourages more nurses to become traveling nurses and follow the money.

What could Oregon do?

Capacity to train nurses is one problem. Oregon Health & Science University got nearly 1,900 applications for its nursing program and accepted 420 students. The University of Portland had 2,000 applications for 260 spots. It's not just a simple matter of accepting more students. There also needs to be faculty and places for clinical placement. Shouldn't the Legislature at least discuss if the state needs to direct more resources at this problem?

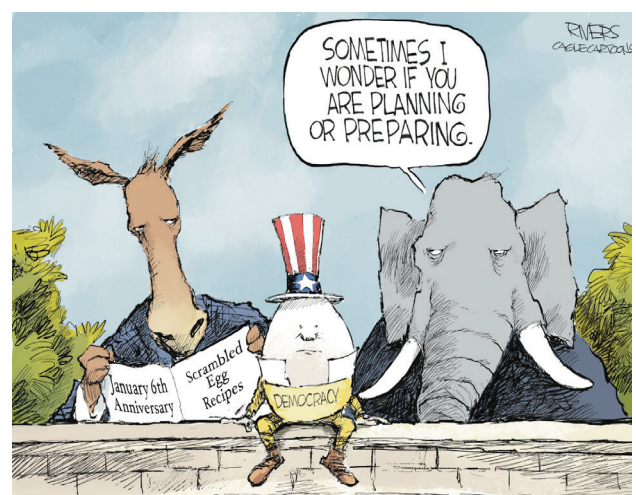
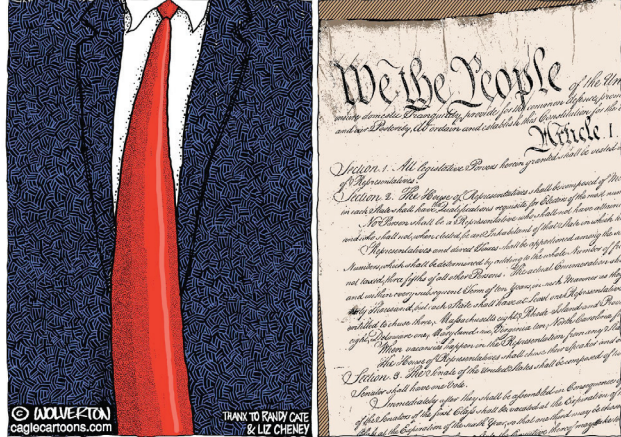
In the short-term, more needs to be done to help existing nurses. More pay and benefits may not be the right answer or the only one. Many nurses feel overworked and overstressed. Doctors, dentists and physician assistants can get free counseling through the Oregon Wellness Program, a nonprofit. Nurses don't get access to that, though their employers may make other alternatives available. The Oregon Board of Nursing is scheduled to discuss funding access to it for nurses later this month.

The state could also make adjustments to its emergency licensure requirements, as reported by The Lund Report. It limited out-of-state nurses to practicing for up to 30 days in critical care units. That could be broadened, though it may be a touchy subject during labor disputes. In any case, relying on nurses to come from out of state isn't a permanent solution.

You can do something, too. If you are not vaccinated, please get vaccinated and get any boosters. It can reduce the chances you will get COVID and the severity when you do.



REPUBLICANS MUST CHOOSE



Is the Reverend Billy a charlatan?

ANNE MORRISON THINKING OUT LOUD

For a long time, I've wondered whether it's even possible to live a life that is both mainstream and moral, if you define moral as a life that doesn't harm other people or the planet we live on. It seems doubtful.

We purchase and use products daily, ignoring the fact that creating, using and disposing of those products harms both the earth and others. Our unrestrained use of fossil fuels has warmed our earth to the degree that we are causing mass extinctions and generating wars and famines, yet as nations and as individuals, we have made minimal reductions in their use.

We continue our casual use and disposal of plastic products, despite knowing that they fill our landfills, collect in enormous oceanic swirls, and disintegrate into particles now distributed across the entire globe. We continue to buy products from China, even though we know about China's slave labor camps and genocidal policies.

As a society and as individuals, we seem unable to distinguish between what we want, what we need, or to take responsibility for the far-reaching effects of our daily actions.

One voice calling for an end to our mindless consumption is the Reverend Billy Talen, an anti-consumerism activist who gives sermons about the coming "Shopecalypse," supported by his "Stop Shopping Gospel Choir." He preaches that our obsession with "obtaining" amplifies the gap

between the wealthy and the poor; that our lust for consumer products creates suffering and misery by exploiting laborers worldwide, primarily the poor and people of color; that our greed devastates our capacity for wonder at the miracle of our own planet and taints the values we teach our children.

At first take, the Reverend Billy seems to mock and parody mainstream Christianity.

But does he really?

As a child, I was steeped in Bible stories that still shape my understanding of right and wrong. For me, the lessons that Reverend Billy references are as timeless and meaningful today as they were thousands of years ago. We struggle with the same temptations, which could also be understood as sins: greed for material possessions, the desire to impress our neighbors, the lust for power. Today, however, the dangers are magnified. Our weaknesses threaten the very existence of the world God has created.

Reflecting my own early lessons, the Reverend Billy preaches a gospel of love for our fellow human beings — especially outsiders and outcasts, the hungry and the poor. He talks of our present-day floods and uncontrollable forest fires in terms of biblical fire and brimstone. Addressing today's insatiable corporate greed, he notes that the one time Jesus became angry was when he threw cheating, profit-minded money-changers out of the temple. He equates the corporate destruction of small local businesses to the fight between David and Goliath, and suggests that our refusal to distinguish between what we want and what we need is a test of biblical proportions of our ability to resist the temptations set before us — a struggle with the devil himself

that each of us must struggle with individually. He asks: "What would Jesus buy?"

The Reverend Billy has made me realize how many of my values are based on those early Bible stories, and how much I view today's world through those early lessons. I've always wondered that God has entrusted us with such an amazing, wondrous planet, but one that so many of us feel entitled to exploit and abuse as we wish. I also wonder whether today's environmental issues, created in significant part by global warming caused by our lust for power and possessions, replicate the biblical wars, famines and pestilence inflicted as punishment for disobeying God's laws. I wonder whether present-day forest fires, sudden flash floods or unprecedented tornadoes triggered by our abuse of this planet foretell the biblical prophesies of fire and floods or signal the wrath of an increasingly angry God.

The Reverend Billy refuses to see his message as hopeless or entirely negative. He states, "In the process of saying no to consumerism, there is a yes. We've decided to identify that 'yes' as life on earth." He insists that there is still time to turn away from our sinful ways and to salvage our God-given Earth by a transformational change in the way we live our lives and in our relationships with each other, and with the Earth.

Is the Reverend Billy a charlatan? Or is he a prophet, recalling long-forgotten religious truths for a culture that idolizes false gods and worships a golden calf?

Anne Morrison is a La Grande resident and retired attorney who has lived in Union County since 2000.

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